United Nations A/C.2/60/SR.23

General Assembly
Sixtieth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
8 December 2005

Original: English

Second Committee

Summary record of the 23rd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 3 November 2005, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hart (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Barbados)

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In the absence of Mr. Wali (Nigeria), Mr. Hart (Barbados), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.35 p.m.

Agenda item 52: Sustainable development (A/60/3, A/60/25 and Add.1, A/60/79, A/60/111, A/60/129, A/60/336 and A/60/167) (*continued*)

(a) Implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (A/60/115, A/60/261 and Corr.1 and A/60/158) (*continued*)

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(c) International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (A/60/180) (*continued*)

(d) Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind (A/60/171) (*continued*)

(e) Sustainable development in mountain regions (A/60/309) (*continued*)

(f) Promotion of new and renewable sources of energy, including the implementation of the World Solar Programme 1996-2005 (A/60/154 and A/60/82) (*continued*)

(g) Implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa (A/60/169 and A/60/171) (*continued*)

(h) Convention on Biological Diversity (A/60/171) (*continued*)

(i) Rendering assistance to poor mountain countries to overcome obstacles in socio-economic and ecological areas (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Skinner-Klée** (Guatemala) said that the signing of the peace accords had ushered in a new era of sustainable development in Guatemala. The country's action-oriented strategy promoted the eco-efficient use of the soil and mountains, sustainable tourism and use of renewable energy. The issues of sustainable development in mountain regions and renewable sources of energy were crucial for Guatemala. The draft resolutions being prepared illustrated the advantages of biennializing items to allow better follow-up and a more up-to-date focus.

2. In Guatemala, widespread soil erosion caused by deforestation, the burning of flora and crop-intensive agriculture had been aggravated by natural disasters. The October mudslides in the wake of hurricane Stan had resulted in 4,000 deaths, mainly in indigenous communities, and serious damage to national infrastructure. Without international support, Guatemala would not be able to maintain its soils in either the tropical forests or in mountainous areas recognized by the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation as fragile, vulnerable to climate change and in need of special protection. Capacity-building and increased technical cooperation for programmes in indigenous mountain communities would be particularly vital.

3. Guatemala was ensuring that indigenous cultures, traditions and knowledge were fully respected in its national mountain development policies and planning, and that indigenous communities had a direct say in decisions affecting their lives. As a member of the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions, Guatemala would make every effort to implement the Secretary-General's recommendation on increased levels of investment and funding for sustainable development in mountain regions, including through innovative financial mechanisms and approaches such as debt relief and payment for environmental services (A/60/309, para. 84 (i)).

4. Guatemala had integrated renewable energy into its regional and domestic policies on social, economic and environmental development. Under its Constitution, the Government had a fundamental obligation to ensure the efficient use of natural resources; the Constitution also stated that the development of renewable sources of energy was in the public interest. Guatemala's potential in the field of hydraulic resources, biomass (both firewood and plant residues) and solar energy was significant. His country also participated in the Strategy for the Promotion of

Renewable Sources of Energy in Central America, which disseminated information on resources, technologies, manufacturers and financing options with a view to reducing project costs, particularly for rural users. Central America had recently held its Sixth Regional Forum on Geothermic and Other Renewable Sources of Energy to address the energy crisis triggered by spiralling oil prices. On the initiative of Brazilian President Luiz da Silva, the States members of the Central American Integration System (SICA) would be cooperating with Brazil in the transfer of technologies for the production and use of combustible ethanol, biodiesel and other alternative and sustainable energy sources.

5. Guatemala had discovered that the use of alternatives to fossil fuels reduced emissions into the atmosphere, and that the use of renewable energy sources offered opportunities for business and the investment of domestic financial resources. In that connection, he noted the emergence of small-scale enterprises that sold improved ovens and cooking equipment on local markets and new possibilities for supplying electricity to rural populations through the use of alternative sources.

6. His delegation would be closely following the outcome of the next session of the Commission on Sustainable Development on energy for sustainable development, industrial development, atmosphere/air pollution and climate change, the sixth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests and the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held in Montreal from 28 November to 9 December.

7. **Mr. Cordovez** (Ecuador) said that developing countries' increasing vulnerability to natural disasters and their low level of preparedness undermined their efforts to achieve their development goals, including those set out in the Millennium Declaration. Ecuador, which was highly vulnerable to natural disasters and to the El Niño and La Niña phenomena, was determined to carry out the commitments it had undertaken under the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

8. The Sachs report had recognized the vulnerability of the Andean region to disasters. Ecuador had endured mudslides, flooding, tremors, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions that had affected nearby populations dependent on agriculture and tourism or forced them to migrate. Stronger disaster risk reduction management was therefore crucial.

9. Ecuador was firmly committed to the Centro Internacional de Investigación del Fenómeno de El Niño (International Centre for Research on the El Niño Phenomenon) (CIIFEN), established in 2003 and based in Quito. The Centre, which supported regional applied science projects on the El Niño phenomenon, was preparing to launch a Seasonal Forecast Centre in western South America, in cooperation with 128 national meteorological stations in the subregion's six countries.

10. Tourism was an increasingly significant factor in sustainable development, employment and poverty reduction and could contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Tourism must be promoted in the developing countries and their tourism sectors must be strengthened through international cooperation (e.g., fewer restrictions, special advantages and security and sustainability measures).

11. He welcomed the first report of the World Tourism Organization and the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism adopted by that Organization in 1999. The World Committee on Tourism Ethics had a flexible mechanism for putting the Code into practice. He urged those countries which had not yet incorporated it into their domestic legislation to do so as soon as possible and encouraged Member States to join the World Tourism Organization if they had not already done so. Lastly, he appealed to Committee members to support the draft resolution that would be submitted on the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism.

12. **Ms. Lima da Veiga** (Cape Verde) saluted the action undertaken by the United Nations system to ensure effective implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, including the adoption of General Assembly resolution 59/311 on the International Meeting to Review the Implementation of that Programme. Equally commendable were the decision by the Commission on Sustainable Development to devote one day of its review session to a review of the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action, the commitment undertaken by Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit to take urgent and concrete action to address the special needs and vulnerabilities of small island

developing States through the full and effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and the establishment of the inter-agency consultative group on small island developing States to serve as a coordination mechanism for the United Nations system. She praised the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in favour of the small island developing States.

13. Expressing her delegation's support in general for all the proposals and recommendations set out in the report of the Secretary-General on the Mauritius Strategy (A/60/401), she called for dialogue on the best ways to translate them into action and to bridge crucial gaps identified in the statements made the previous day on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). She noted with interest the recommendation on the promotion of desirable synergies among all stakeholders at all levels contained in the Summary of the report.

14. The regional meeting of the Atlantic, Indian Ocean, Mediterranean and South China Sea (AIMS) countries, held in Mahe, Seychelles, the previous week, had adopted a programme of seven broad priority issues for the region, culled from the sectoral priorities outlined in the Barbados Programme of Action and the Mauritius Strategy. A participatory approach would be taken to implementing the programme, which would form the basis for the elaboration of national and regional operational plans of action. The AIMS countries had overcome various obstacles to achieve some progress in setting up national machinery and operational programmes to implement and follow up the Mauritius Strategy. Despite its graduation from least developed country status and the heavy impact of drought, Cape Verde, too, was putting those mechanisms in place.

15. Noting that insufficient coordination at various levels had prevented a number of AIMS countries from attending the regional meeting, she appealed to the United Nations bodies responsible for issues relating to the small island developing States, AOSIS and individual Members States to work together more closely. The Small Island Developing States Unit in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs must be strengthened.

16. In view of the upcoming interregional meeting and FAO special event on small island developing States, the need for a permanent coordination mechanism for the AIMS region was more pressing than ever. Spread across four oceans and three continents, the AIMS countries faced many difficulties in formulating a common strategy for resource mobilization and the promotion of common initiatives. Thus far, the secretariat of the Indian Ocean Commission had been responsible for coordination on an interim basis; however, it lacked the human and financial resources to continue fulfilling that mandate in addition to its primary mandate, which pertained to only three AIMS countries. Her delegation called on the United Nations system to assist the AIMS region in creating a viable coordination structure of its own.

17. Reiterating the link between poverty and desertification, she expressed concern at the insufficient allocation of resources to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. She urged those countries which had not yet done so to pay their outstanding contributions to the core budget of the Convention. While concerned about the modest increase in the core budget and significant staff reduction decided at the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, her delegation welcomed the formalization of the relationship between the Global Environment Facility and the secretariat of the Convention. It hoped that similar synergies would be created.

18. Chronic drought was one of the root causes of internal migration and emigration in Cape Verde. Firmly committed to implementing the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, her Government had elaborated national and municipal plans to that end and integrated them into its national development plan. Her delegation was pleased that 2006 had been proclaimed the International Year of Deserts and Desertification and that a number of excellent activities had been planned in conjunction with it. It was grateful to the Government of Algeria for offering to host a summit on the theme of desertification, migration and security.

19. **Ms. Sila** (Samoa), speaking on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum Group, reaffirmed the importance of the Mauritius Strategy and called for the earliest possible implementation of the activities proposed in General Assembly resolution 59/311. The development of a plan of activities with relevant United Nations bodies, the mainstreaming of the Mauritius Strategy into the relevant United Nations agencies and the strengthening of the Small Island Developing States Unit within the Department of Economic and Social Affairs would be particularly important in that context.

20. Two weeks earlier, Samoa had hosted a successful Pacific Regional Meeting to follow up the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy. At that meeting, the Forum had reaffirmed that the Mauritius Strategy, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Millennium Development Goals, its own Pacific Plan, regional policies, frameworks and action plans and partnership initiatives were key to achieving sustainable development in the region.

21. Recognizing the critical need to streamline the procedures for obtaining financial and technical resources, the Group was finalizing its Pacific SIDS matrix. The Group also acknowledged the importance of mainstreaming the Mauritius Strategy into country-driven and country-owned national development plans.

22. The Pacific Islands Forum Group looked forward to the forthcoming Inter-Regional Meeting to follow up the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, to be held in Rome, and to the special ministerial event on food security and sustainable development in small island developing States that would be sponsored by FAO. The Group also appreciated the decision of the Commission on Sustainable Development to devote one day of its review session to the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy and other activities in the Pacific region.

23. In conclusion, she said that, while accepting primary responsibility for the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, the small island developing States needed support from the United Nations system and the international community.

24. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) said that her country welcomed the launch of the International Year of Deserts and Desertification (2006) and saw it as an important opportunity to enhance further the implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa. The World Summit Outcome had stressed the need to address the causes of desertification and land degradation through the mobilization of adequate and predictable financial resources, the transfer of technology and capacity-building at all levels. It was now time to translate those commitments into coordinated action at the international, national and local levels.

25. As a State party to the Convention to Combat Desertification, Mongolia had adopted a national plan of action to combat desertification in 2003 and set up a national committee consisting of representatives of government agencies, academia and non-governmental organizations to monitor implementation of the Convention. The national plan of action aimed, inter alia, at: improving legal and economic measures to combat desertification; formulating and implementing strategies to prevent and halt the spread of desertification through studies on its root causes; organizing awareness-raising campaigns at national and local levels; and enhancing regional and international cooperation.

26. Mongolia was in one of the world's most arid regions and suffered considerably from drought. During the last decade of the twentieth century, areas affected by drought had increased by 3.4 per cent and areas engulfed by desertification had increased by 5.4 per cent, especially in the Gobi Desert region, which covered 42 per cent of the territory of Mongolia. The Government had consequently launched a "Green Belt" programme designed to halt the spread of desertification and sand movement over the next 30 years. Anti-desertification strategies had also been adopted in a number of national development policies.

27. Long-term and short-term measures to strengthen national and local capacity to combat desertification required not only commitment and concerted efforts but also adequate financial support and cooperation. The delegation of Mongolia therefore welcomed the proposed memorandum of understanding between the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

28. **Ms. Núñez de Odremán** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that the 2005 Summit Outcome was merely a working paper; because of its serious flaws, her Government did not view it as establishing any

mandate or obligation for her country. The paper gave priority to designing mechanisms and instruments for States to intervene in conflicts, yet did not discuss strategies and mechanisms for achieving sustainable development. Priority should be given to actions aimed at combating poverty, promoting economic growth and correcting the unsustainable production and consumption patterns created by unfettered capitalism. The relationship between poverty and the environment had been discussed at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. Decades of efforts to reach global agreement on sustaining human life on the planet had not resolved the fundamental problem, which was the political and economic philosophy underlying current development patterns.

29. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had instituted political and institutional reforms based on the concept of the State as a participatory society in which social and economic changes were aimed at maximizing sustainable development. One of its objectives was to integrate environmental management and social management. All citizens were being made aware of the need to preserve the natural environment and encouraged to be actively involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of public policies promoting sustainable development.

30. Water management policies were implemented through local management units in which municipal governments provided services, and communities participated in planning, regulation and control. A meeting had been held on 25 October 2005 to discuss preparations for the Fourth World Water Forum to be held in Mexico in 2006 and discuss successful experiences in water management. Ninety per cent of the population now had access to potable water, and 75 per cent had sewage services. The adoption of the new low-income housing and habitat act ensured that all Venezuelans had access to decent housing.

31. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was fulfilling its commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, decision 391 of the Commission of the Cartagena Agreement and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety. A National Commission on Biosafety had been created to advise the executive branch on biosafety issues. Her country had acceded to the Kyoto Protocol and was a party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

32. As an oil-producing country, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had set in motion a number of initiatives designed to address the energy crisis. The PetroCaribe initiative had been launched on 29 June 2005 in pursuance of the energy cooperation agreement signed by 14 Caribbean countries at the first energy meeting of Caribbean Heads of State and/or Government. PetroCaribe was an energy cooperation initiative designed to resolve existing asymmetries in access to energy resources through a fair and equitable arrangement on trade among the countries of the Caribbean region. It would coordinate policies relating to petroleum and petroleum by-products, gas, electricity, technological cooperation, training, energy infrastructure and alternative energy sources.

33. Any environmental regulations to be agreed by the international community should be based on the principles of non-discrimination, transparency, predictability, national treatment, rejection of unilateralism and non-conditionality. They should go beyond mere commercial activity and promote intersectoral trade so as to strengthen the sovereignty of peoples. The developed countries must change their unsustainable production patterns and honour their commitments concerning ODA.

34. **Mr. Tameo** (Papua New Guinea) said that his delegation supported the efforts of the United Nations system to ensure coordination in the implementation of sustainable development, although Member States also had to assume responsibility in that area. For its part, Papua New Guinea was fully committed to the Mauritius Strategy.

35. Papua New Guinea and other Pacific island States were particularly exposed to natural disasters, such as tsunamis and floods, which disrupted their economic activities and adversely affected their development efforts. The outcomes of the Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction were being seriously pursued in the Pacific region and a regional framework had been developed to implement the Yokohama Strategy at the recent Pacific Islands Forum meeting in Papua New Guinea. His country supported the action-oriented approach to the forthcoming Third International Conference on Early Warning and hoped to address there a number of priority issues, such as the establishment of early warning systems.

36. As small island developing States were particularly vulnerable to climate change and its

devastating impacts, Papua New Guinea was committed to the implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol. Its efforts should be supported by the international community.

37. Papua New Guinea participated in the Coalition for Rainforest Initiatives, which provided incentives for countries with rainforests to have access to international markets for emissions trading, which would have multiple benefits such as the eradication of poverty and climatic stability.

38. Underscoring the importance of promoting new and renewable sources of energy, the delegation of Papua New Guinea commended the work of UNESCO to oversee implementation of the World Solar Programme, 1996-2005. Papua New Guinea had great potential to develop and use renewable sources of energy to meet its domestic energy needs and would pursue its policy objectives with the support and assistance of the United Nations system and other development partners.

39. The Convention to Combat Desertification was a vital instrument to address the issue of land degradation. Although considerable progress had been made by the Convention secretariat to work closely with GEF, the Bretton Woods institutions and other partners, available financial resources were inadequate to address land degradation. Development partners should increase their support to affected countries and GEF should increase its fourth replenishment of the Trust Fund to implement the Convention.

40. Papua New Guinea was home to over 5 per cent of the world's biodiversity resources and a party to the Convention on Biological Diversity. In view of the findings of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the international community should support developing countries that had a significant share of the world's biodiversity and help them conserve their vital resources and address the target of significantly reducing biodiversity loss by 2010. He commended the development of action programmes on the biological diversity of inland water ecosystems, as well as marine and coastal biodiversity to protect increasingly threatened marine biodiversity resources.

41. **Mr. Al-Mowed** (Kuwait) reaffirmed his Government's commitment to good governance, sound economic practices and joint international responsibility for achieving sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental domains. Stronger and more effective partnership was needed with developing States to involve them in international decision-making and help them to meet the challenges of the new world order. The developed States must honour their commitment to allocating 0.7 per cent of their gross national product to official development assistance by 2015. For its part, Kuwait had contributed 1.3 per cent of its gross national product, between 1990 and 2003 to development projects both bilaterally, through the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, and through regional and international organizations such as the OPEC Fund for International Development and the African Development Bank (ADB).

42. Kuwait continued to make progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, including the goal of attaining environmental sustainability. It had created the Environment Public Authority in 1995, had successfully established dozens of artificial breeding grounds on the ocean floor in order to safeguard biological diversity, and had conducted a unique experiment by planting coral in protected zones. On the other hand, Kuwait's energy consumption was rising at a rate of 3.5 per cent per year, which was too high to achieve sustainability, but difficult to reduce given the rise in global demand and increases in energy consumption levels among producers.

43. Oil-producing States should employ the latest production technology to address such problems, and stabilize global oil prices, which had risen sharply since the 1980s, harming consumers and producers alike. Volatility in the oil markets was exacerbated by natural disasters, instability in oil-producing regions, market speculation, and high taxes on oil in developed States. Kuwait hoped that its investments in refineries and partnerships in Asia and America would help to meet future global demand. Kuwait also reaffirmed its support for the proposal of Qatar to host the first follow-up conference to the International Conference on Financing for Development in 2007.

44. **Mr. Laurin** (Canada) said that his country was demonstrating its commitment to address climate change by hosting the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Montreal in November 2005. It recognized the importance of promoting sustainable global development and of effectively addressing climate change — which also implied dealing with other issues such as development, health and energy

security — and wished to play a leadership role in that area. All countries recognized the need to make their economies more sustainable and secure by adopting efficient, less polluting technologies and energy sources. Canada's own foreign policy was designed to promote a multilateralism based on multiple responsibilities, one of which was the collective responsibility to ensure the well-being of future generations.

45. The task facing the Montreal Conference would not be easy but the shared desire to address climate change directly should enable the world community to come together and initiate productive discussions on real, long-term progress. In recent months, Canada had held over 140 bilateral meetings to discuss options for effective long-term action on climate change. The insights gleaned from those meetings should result in a forward-looking decision in Montreal based on six key elements: ensuring environmental effectiveness; broadening participation; advancing development goals; strengthening market mechanisms; realizing the potential of advanced technologies; and dealing with adaptation.

46. **Mr. Bharati** (Nepal) said that his country was one of the richest in terms of biodiversity and was committed to conserving it in a sustainable manner. Half of Nepal's population lived in mountain regions and were thus particularly vulnerable in times of natural disasters. Since mountain communities shared similar challenges and hardships, an exchange of experiences would help them to utilize better their natural resources and address their social and economic problems. International cooperation mechanisms, such as the Bishkek Mountain Platform or the Mountain Partnership, would provide an opportunity for countries to network and address interrelated aspects of sustainable mountain development.

47. As a party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Nepal had recently ratified the Kyoto Protocol and was fully committed to international efforts to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. The mountain communities in Nepal were traditionally dependent on mountain resources for medicinal needs, and he called on the international community to contribute to research and development of mountain resources for medicinal purposes.

48. Mountain communities had unique knowledge and experience and the Government of Nepal had, accordingly, adopted development policies and plans emphasizing the protection of the natural environment and sensible use of resources.

49. The Nepalese Government had taken a number of public and private initiatives to boost awareness and promote the cause of mountain development. However, terrorism had exacerbated the situation, causing even greater hardship to mountain communities, and the Government was currently granting the highest priority to restoring peace and security.

50. In an attempt to ensure equal development of all regions, particularly remote mountain areas, the Government had introduced a number of targeted programmes, including the promotion of ecotourism. The King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation had also undertaken various environment programmes to ensure a balance between human needs and the environment, with a community-based approach aimed at long-term sustainability.

51. Since ecological and environmental problems were global concerns, it was important to promote cooperation among government bodies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and local authorities in implementing environment programmes. International cooperation and solidarity for sustainable mountain development should receive greater support, thereby helping poor mountain countries in their endeavours to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development.

52. **Mr. Zoubi** (Jordan) said that, owing to the diversion of the Jordan River since the 1967 war, the evaporation rate from the Dead Sea exceeded the rate of water inflow, causing a steady decline in the water level of nearly one metre every year. At that rate, the Dead Sea would dry up completely within 50 years, with dangerous economic, social and political consequences. If the Sea dried up, the wind would spread the remaining salty minerals to the neighbouring fertile fields in the Jordan Valley, turning what was a natural greenhouse into a desert. As the water level declined, so would the water pressure at the bottom of the sea, allowing freshwater from surrounding aquifers to seep in.

53. In May, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority had signed an agreement on the construction of a canal that would draw water from the Red Sea,

raise it and then drop it into the Dead Sea 400 metres below sea level. The steep drop would generate enough electricity to help pump in water and power a desalination plant that would provide 850 million cubic metres of freshwater annually. Holiday resorts and a water park would be built along the route. The first phase of the project — a two-year $20-million feasibility study — would be partly funded by the World Bank. The study would indicate the best way to move the water northward and whether the water of both Seas would mix or merely bond in layers. It was estimated that the final phase would cost between $4 and $7 billion.

54. The project, once operational, would be a model of sustainable development, in which an entire ecosystem was saved by harnessing resources generated from the project itself. Excess freshwater would be redirected to the lands of the three parties to the agreement. His delegation looked forward to continued international support for the project, and to the implementation of all its phases.

55. **Mr. Migliore** (Observer for the Holy See) said that a fragmented sectoral approach to the problems of development must be replaced by a holistic and multisectoral one. Among the first cluster of threats identified by the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change were economic and social threats, including poverty, infectious diseases and environmental degradation. In facing them and in promoting the development of responsibility and solidarity, local communities would have to be involved in evaluating and conserving nature, and they must receive a fair share of benefits. Costs to natural ecosystems would need to be taken into account in all economic decisions, and protection of natural assets would have to be given much higher priority in governments' planning, investment and budgeting.

56. Given the importance of forests and the high rates of forest loss, the finalization of an international treaty on the protection of forests was much to be desired. Clean drinking water and basic sanitation were also essential; it was thus, in the interest of all countries to invest in the implementation of integrated water resource management programmes.

57. The next biennial cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development would be devoted to themes central to peace and human development, above all in the poorest areas with the slimmest capacity to adapt, scarce energy resources and greater exposure to the consequences of climate change. It was encouraging to witness the growing awareness of climate change demonstrated, for example, at the G-8 Summit in Gleneagles. Serious discussions should follow on how States could provide incentives for the further development of renewable energy sources, begin to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies and invest in research and development of clean, efficient and cheap replacements for fossil fuels.

58. **Mr. Sabbagh** (Syrian Arab Republic), recalling that the principle of common but differentiated responsibility was the cornerstone of global cooperation for sustainable development, endorsed the Secretary-General's call for donors to target funding support to developing countries in key policy options and practical measures. The upcoming session of the Commission on Sustainable Development should focus on research and development, technology transfers, and renewable energy that developing countries could afford.

59. The proposed "Water for Life" conference would be an important step in realizing the first and seventh of the Millennium Development Goals. Desertification continued to affect hundreds of millions of people, and the international community should ensure that predictable sources of funding were available to implement the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification drawing on the work of the Global Environment Facility in that area. The upcoming International Year of Deserts and Desertification in 2006 would be a good opportunity to promote United Nations desertification programmes.

60. The Israeli delegation had evidently forgotten that Israel was contributing to desertification in the occupied Arab territories by depriving Arab citizens of their inalienable right to access water resources, and by stripping land, uprooting trees, and burying nuclear and chemical waste in the occupied Arab territories.

61. **Mr. Sermoneta** (Israel), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the allegations made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic were groundless. That representative had recently heard from the Executive Director of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia that there was no substantial evidence to support his claims. Despite that, the Syrian delegation had managed to have those lies included in draft resolution A/C.2/60/L.11, currently

before the Committee. As in many other instances, the Syrian representative seemed to believe that, when repeated often enough, a lie became truth. The Committee should reject such attempts unequivocally.

62. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that his assertions about the practices of the occupying force could be verified in many United Nations reports, especially the report on the repercussions of those practices on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, particularly the inhabitants of the occupied Golan and East Jerusalem. That report showed that the occupying force was transforming agricultural lands of the Arab citizens into a desert, uprooting trees and causing erosion. Numerous reports attested to the fact that the occupying authorities were not complying with the decisions of the United Nations and were violating the rights of the Arab peoples living under occupation. Those rights had been reaffirmed at several summits and meetings of the United Nations. The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development had stated that foreign occupation was a threat to sustainable development. Israeli practices included the theft of natural resources through intensive use of the environment. Peoples living under the occupation were not able to achieve sustainable development.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.